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EVALUATION OF THE THRESHOLD PROGRAM AT LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE.

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IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION FOR LOW-ABILITY STUDENTS, 35 ENTERING FRESHMEN WITH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE ABILITY TEST SCORES IN THE LOWEST 16 PERCENT WERE INVITED TO BE IN A PILOT PROGRAM OF BASIC CLASSES IN ENGLISH, SPEECH, PSYCHOLOGY, AND AN ELECTIVE. OF THE 35, 28 COMPLETED THE SEMESTER, TWO TRANSFERRED TO REGULAR CLASSES, AND FIVE DROPPED OUT. THE CALIFORNIA TEST OF MENTAL MATURITY SHOWED IQ'S OF 76 TO 108 AMONG THE STUDENTS, WITH A MEAN OF 92. THEIR MEAN HIGH SCHOOL GPA WAS 1.99. IN THE 11TH GRADE, THEIR READING DEFICIENCIES HAD BEEN AS MUCH AS 4 YEARS, WITH AN AVERAGE RETARDATION OF 2 YEARS. ON THE PROGRESSIVE MATURITIES TEST, ONE-THIRD OF THE 35 SCORED ABOVE THE 50TH PERCENTILE FOR GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS. AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER (SPRING 1965), QUESTIONNAIRES INDICATED GENERAL STUDENT SATISFACTION. STUDENTS STATED THAT THEY FELT THEY HAD IMPROVED IN READING, IN WRITING, AND ESPECIALLY IN SPEAKING. RETESTS WITH THE CALIFORNIA READING TEST AND THE DIAGNOSTIC READING TEST SHOWED MODEST IMPROVEMENT. THE AUTHOR STATES THAT THE STUDY WAS NOT EXPERIMENTAL IN NATURE BECAUSE OF THE SMALL SAMPLE, LACK OF ADEQUATE CONTROLS, AND FAILURE TO CONTROL THE HAWTHORNE EFFECT. (WO)

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LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

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AT LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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AT LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

Introduction

The Threshold Program was conceived in an effort to increase the effectiveness of education for low academic ability students, while at the same time to allow regular transfer classes to cover more content at greater depth. Studies of the low ability group have revealed a high dropout rate, low achievement pattern, maladjustment in regular college transfer courses, and inadequate vocational preparation after two years of education. A consideration of these characteristics has provided a stimulus for instituting a program which would attempt to meet the needs of these students. Such a program was initiated on a pilot basis during the Spring Semester, 1965, at Valley College. The program attempted to provide three basic classes and an elective class wherein the "threshold students" maximize achievement and prepare optimally for the future.

Organization of the Threshold Program

At the beginning of the semester, 35 students were invited to participate in the Threshold Program on the basis of SCAT* total raw score in the lowest 16% of the entering freshmen. Students who agreed to enroll in this program were assigned to basic classes in English, Speech, and Psychology, and in addition were allowed one elective class. Although the program was initially organized on an experimental basis, the small numbers involved and the lack of adequate controls suggested that the program be of an exploratory nature and receive primarily descriptive treatment in evaluation.

* The School and College Ability Test (SCAT) is administered to all entering freshmen.

Description of the Threshold Class

At the beginning of the semester, the Threshold class was composed of 35 students -- 18 girls and 17 boys. Of this number, two were transferred to regular classes, three dropped from school and two "faded out". Hence, 28 students or 80% of the initial group completed the semester.

The average age of the class was found to be 19 with a range from 18 to 25 years.

High School Performance

A study of the cumulative records of the students' performance in high school on the California Test of Mental Maturity (CTMM) reveals the following data:

CTMM INDICES

	Mean Index	Range
Verbal Scale	90	69 to 109
Non-Verbal Scale	93	72 to 124
Total Scale	92	76 to 108

Reading Achievement Tests taken in the 11th grade showed some of the students to be behind their grade as much as four years, with the average reading grade deficiency to be about two years.

The mean high school grade point average for this group was 1.99 with a range from 1.5 to 2.7. It is interesting to note that four or five of the students graduated in the upper half of their high school class.

Early in the semester, the class provided some data about themselves and their parents. This data is summarized as follows:

1. Approximately 55% of the fathers had a high school diploma, 10% had completed college, and one had received the M.D. degree.

2. Over half the mothers had a high school education.

3. Approximately 33% of the fathers were working in semi-skilled occupations. Representative of all occupations mentioned were cafe-worker, display manager, welder, cook, storekeeper, printer, painter, policeman, fireman, electrician, and caterer.

4. Approximately half the mothers were housewives, 10% were in the secretarial occupations and 10% were in teaching.

5. In answer to the question, "Why are you in college?", the responses are summarized as follows:

   (a) to acquire skills in various areas (e.g. theatre arts--2, nursing--3, secretarial arts--3, business--5, teaching, and art).

   (b) to find a marriage partner

   (c) to finish high school

   (d) to better myself--8

   (e) to engage in sports--2

   (f) undecided--5

EVALUATION

At the beginning of the semester, the threshold students were given the following tests:

(1) Diagnostic Reading Test - Grades 7 through College Freshmen, Form A

(2) California Reading Test - Grades 4-5-6, Form X

(3) Raven"s Progressive Matrices

(4) Brown-Carlsen Listening-Comprehension Test

At the conclusion of the semester, the students were administered parallel forms of the Diagnostic Reading (Form B) and the California Reading Test (Form Y) and in addition were asked to complete a questionnaire which sampled certain attitudes about the course and their feelings related to it. The results of tests and questionnaire are shown in tables on the following pages.

Table I	A Summary of Questionnaire Given To Students in The Threshold Program
Table II	Suggestion for Improvement of Threshold Program
Table III	Feelings Expressed About Threshold Program
Table IV	Threshold Program Test Data

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO STUDENTS IN THRESHOLD PROGRAM

	Yes		No		Total
	n	%	n	%	
1. If you had it to do over, would you sign up for this program	19	68	9	32	28
2. Has this program helped you in your relationships with other people?	21	78	6	22	27
3. Do you know more about yourself as a result of this program?	20	74	7	26	27
4. Have you decided about the job in which you would like to work?	21	75	7	25	28
5. Have your job plans changed because of this program?	6	21	22	79	28
6. Have your educational plans changed as a result of this program?	10	36	18	64	28
7. Do you like college work?	27	100	___	---	27

		No Improvement		Some Improvement		Much Improvement	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
8. Indicate how you have improved in each of the following areas:	Reading	___	___	20	74	7	26
	Speaking	___	___	8	29	20	71
	Writing	5	18	18	64	5	18

TABLE II

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THRESHOLD PROGRAM

The following statements were made by students in answer to the question "What suggestions would you have to improve this program?" Comments are shown as written.

1. "I think if more attention was paid to <u>better study skills</u> it would be a great help to everyone. I thought the course would improve by study habits but it has not."

2. "I think that within the people put into this program there is many different types of problems. Many of the things taught this semester weren't of any help to me. I think that the people should be divided into groups according to their specific problems."

3. "I would suggest additional classes added to this program. For instance a <u>little science and math</u>."

4. "Have two class every day of the week is rather boring at times. I feel if they were held three times a week people would be much more interested."

5. "I think this program should have started before this. Then maybe more people would still be in college. The only improvement that I can see is that it should be expanded so more students can take it."

6. "I think that the three class were OK just the way they are. I think that the three teachers were the best idea of all. The teachers tryed as hard as we did."

7. "The suggestions I have is that we should have a more difficult book. This would enable us to learn to study and at the same time, teach us too."

8. "I think the program could be improved by increasing the student's work."

9. "I feel that the three classes should be put closer together. <u>For example 8, 10, and 11 o'clock</u>."

10. "The one way in which this program can be improved is by making each class a little harder. To prepare students for the older class they will take. Also I think that the Eng. class would only have to meet 3 days a week."

11. "I feel that the experimental program can improve by letting the students of the program be treated as <u>equal</u> to other college students by their instructors."

TABLE III

FEELINGS EXPRESSED ABOUT THRESHOLD PROGRAM

The following comments were made in answer to the question "How do you feel about the program?"

1. "I feel this program is a very good idea. It enabled us to work at our own speed and level without the pressures we have all felt in school in the past."

2. "I feel that this program gave me the opportunity to learn about myself and my capabilities. Also the compation that I faced was the same level as me."

3. "I feel that everybody who ever comes to Valley should take this course no matter how smart or dumb they are. This program could help everybody. This course really helped me a lot, and after taking this course I feel I could really excelerate a lot."

4. "I am really glad that I got into this program. I am pretty sure if it weren't for this program, that I might not have been able to continue on with regular classes. This program has helped me understand how important college really is."

5. "I think the program was very helpful to me, and to students who would like to prepare themselves for doing better college work. I felt pretty let down to know I didn't do so well on the entrance exam and I would have to take these classes, but now I feel they have helped me quite a bit. I am very happy that stayed with the program."

6. "I enjoyed very much. It has improved by abilities in the three areas -- reading, speaking, writing, as well as others. And I sincerely think if the course is longer, I would improve my self much more."

7. "I think that this program has helped me more than anythink I have very had in school befor. I would like to go into another if there was one offered."

8. "I like the program because I didn't have to work to hard, but I did learn a lot. As tired of school as I was, had it not been for this program I would have dropped by now."

9. "I beliefe it is a very good idea and well projected program. It let's the student know and more fully understand his weaknesses. It puts the student on a trial like basis letting him know if he or she can really make a goal of college."

10. "I feel the experimental program is very good for students that are incapable of doing college work when they come to college. It gives them a chance to do what they feel they can do."

11. "I feel this program has done a very good job in helping us find and work out our weak areas."

12. "As the semester comes to an end I can look back and see I have learned about things I never knew before. And as I have stated before I have received much benefit from the English and Speech class."

13. "It was a good program, but there was too much of a range of different I.Q.'s."

14. "I enjoyed this program; it was a help to me. I wouldn't take it over, because I've made an improvement.(a verly big one) My ambition is higher because I understand more. I feel this should be continued for other students in the future."

15. "I feel that this program has, and will in the future, given the students, expecially myself, a gift of wisdom and understandment that will enable them to obtain their scholastic goals at this college or at any other college in this country. I would like to thank the Los Angeles School system and Valley College for the opportunity to take this special program which has enabled me to now continue on with my education.

TABLE IV

THRESHOLD PROGRAM TEST DATA

	California Reading Test Grades 4,5,6		Diagnostic Reading Test Grade 7 -- Freshman Year		Progressive Matrices	Brown-Carlsen Listening
Student	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test		
1.	7.6	8.1[a]	14	13[b]	37[c]	14[d]
2.	6.9	7.0	2	7	5	1
3.	8.3	8.3	1	1	54	6
4.	6.5	7.2	1	---	45	12
5.	7.6	8.7	3	2	80	62
6.	6.9	7.8	3	7	54	22
7.	7.9	8.1	1	3	13	10
8.	7.3	7.1	2	1	18	14
9.	5.5	---	0	1	54	5
10.	7.6	---	7	8	58	14
11.	7.5	7.6	3	4	37	3
12.	7.8	7.8	9	14	37	51
13.	6.6	7.2	6	10	--	1
14.	8.0	8.1	4	9	93	8

[a] Grade placement

[b] Centile Rank, publisher's norms, 13th year

[c] Centile Rank, graduating h.s. senior norms

[d] Centile Rank, publisher's norms, 13th year

Student	California Reading Test		Diagnostic Reading Test		Matrices	Brown-Carlsen
15.	7.7	7.2	3	2	54	8
16.	7.9	8.4	7	4	80	32
17.	7.3	7.8	11	41	25	27
18.	4.4	---	1	--	7	--
19.	7.7	7.2	9	13	25	12
20.	7.9	7.9	17	28	21	20
21.	7.7	7.8	26	24	37	51
22.	7.0	7.7	1	2	29	5
23.	6.6	---	1	--	72	--
24.	7.7	7.2	10	16	54	32
25.	7.7	8.1	20	28	45	27
26.	7.9	7.7	10	13	58	14
27.	6.3	7.1	3	1	15	27
28.	8.0	8.1	11	14	--	37
29.	8.0	---	14	31	--	--
30.	6.7	6.2	1	1	7	1
31.	7.0	7.7	5	2	45	14
32.	7.2	8.1	3	7	21	20
33.	7.6	7.2	3	7	--	5
34.	6.6	---	1	--	58	--
35.	---	---	2	--	13	--

COMMENTS

1. The summary of the questionnaire (Table I) indicates that a majority of the students expressed satisfaction with the program.

2. A few students indicated that both their job and educational plans had been changed as a consequence of this program (Table I).

3. Most of the students indicated that they had improved in reading, writing, and speaking, the area of greatest improvement being that of speaking. 71% of the group indicated "much improvement" in speaking (Table I).

4. In response to the question, "How do you feel about the Threshold Program?", most students answered in a laudatory manner, although comments ran the gamut from slight to enthusiastic approval.

5. Many students had suggestions as to how the program could be improved. These constructive comments are shown in Table II.

6. It is interesting to note the wide range of non-verbal abilities as shown on the Progressive Matrices. Approximately one-third of the students scored above the 50th centile, using norms for graduating high school students, while one girl scored at the 93rd centile (Table IV).

7. A wide range of abilities was also noted on the Brown-Carlsen Listening-Comprehension Test. The range was from the first to the 62nd centile with a median centile rank of 14.

8. An observation of the data shown in Table IV indicates that in most cases, there was modest improvement on both the California Achievement and the Diagnostic Reading tests. A candid appraisal would not term this a significant increase in view of the standard error of measurement of the tests involved. It would perhaps be presumptuous to believe that in the short space of three or four months, changes could be accomplished which had not been effected in the previous twelve years of schooling.

9. As was indicated earlier, evaluation of the program is primarily descriptive for the following reasons: (1) the small sample, (2) lack of adequate controls, and (3) failure to control the Hawthorne Effect.*

10. Finally, it is suggested that the experiment be repeated with adequate controls and with an adequate sample.

* The tendency for a group receiving experimental treatment to achieve primarily because of the attention received by being an experimental group.